

**2005 White House Conference on Aging
Solutions Forum on Mental Health and Aging in Illinois**

Good Morning.

My name is Carol Hartmann and I am a Community Liaison with the Older Adult Program at Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health Hospital in Hoffman Estates.

I am also here today as a member of the Illinois Coalition on Mental Health and Aging – and as one of the pioneers in the development of the Northern Caucus for this statewide coalition. I am before you here today with professional and personal experiences on mental health issues. From a professional point of view, we are aware of the stigma that remains around mental health, especially for the aging population. From a personal point of view – we recognize that these stigmas prevail as we seek out services for loved ones.

About a year ago, my good friend and colleague Mary Ellen Kelly and I explored the prospect of facilitating a northern caucus for the statewide Coalition. Our primary goal - and our passion - was to provide comprehensive education and training opportunities on mental health issues for all professionals who work with the older adult population. Mary Ellen and I are members of many professional groups that address a multitude of issues for seniors. There is an abundance of resources available for seniors. **There are a limited number of networking groups that primarily focus on mental health issues for the older adult population.** Mary Ellen and I agreed that a professional forum that addresses mental health issues related to the aging population could benefit those who attend by providing for them insights, education, resources, networking and partnership opportunities. If we were able to accomplish this – then our goal is met.

We've been delighted with the interest and with the attendance at these forums. We've averaged 75 attendees at each of our meetings, and have welcomed new members every time we've met. Our catchment area includes the areas from Kankakee to the Wisconsin border: Rockford to Chicago. Our speakers have received rave reviews – including *Father Bill Burke* who addressed mental health from a very personal and poignant point of view: *Dr. Nick DeLosSantos*, Psychiatrist with Alexian Brothers who addressed the **“Changing the Face of Mental Health in Geriatrics: Understanding the Older Adult in Today's Culture”**, a comprehensive training by Rick Germann and Colleen Caron on the **Suicide Prevention: THE QPR Method: Question, Persuade & Refer**; *Dr. Sandy Finkel* who provided insights in his presentation: **“Global Views on Mental Health & Aging: A Prelude to the White House Conference on Aging**, and most recently, Scott Damiani of the Outreach Foundation who spoke on **Gambling and Addiction in the Older Adult**. Mary Ellen and I are pleased with the outcome of this endeavor, and look forward to continuing to provide these educational opportunities that are provocative in nature. We hope to expand our educational forums by providing training to ALL who work with older adults – and help them to recognize the signs and symptoms of depression, anxiety and other related disorders.

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Even with our efforts – we know that there continues to be a long road ahead. It's vitally important that we continue the work with our coalition partners to facilitate education and access to mental health services. It is our mission to continue to provide education and work toward removing the stigma that has plagued mental health for many centuries. The older adult generation of today has experienced many challenges and tragedies. They speak of The Great Depression, World Wars, and the Holocaust. They speak of great loss with a tear in their eye or a quiver in their lip. The older adult population of tomorrow will continue to see similar tragedies as our world becomes more complicated. The older adult population of tomorrow may be more at risk. As a society, we must give ourselves permission to seek out help for our sense of vulnerability.

Former President Jimmy Carter wrote in his 1998 book "The Virtues of Aging" a chapter on how to stay healthy. In Chapter 7 – *Good Health for the Elderly*, he writes: 'it is interesting how certain television broadcasts target us. The most obvious is the noon or evening news, which hardly ever includes commercials that would appeal to young people. Instead, it is filled with ads of incontinence pads, remedies for constipation, denture adhesives, vitamin-charged drinks that give pep to the aged, and medicines that control heartburn and prevent osteoporoses'. The chapter continues with insights into maintaining good health, as defined by foremost experts on health – and include smoking cessation, maintaining ideal body weights, exercise, limited consumption on unhealthy food, not to drink and drive, fastening seat belts, removing handguns from the home, and having regular *medical* check-ups.

On behalf of the northern caucus of the coalition, we define ***Good Health*** as also taking care of oneself both spiritually and emotionally. The brain – a critically vital organ much like the heart - must be nurtured.

In conclusion, I wish to comment that our drive to develop this coalition could not be possible without the support of our respective facilities - Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health Hospital and Harbor Senior Concepts. It is truly an honor to work for an organization like Alexian Brothers that supports the spirit of these initiatives.

Thank you